

**Remarks by Governor Christine Gregoire**  
**News conference on drought emergency**  
**March 10, 2005**

**Opening**

Welcome. I love August in Yakima!

Unfortunately, the fact that it's a beautiful day here in March is not good news – and the unseasonably warm weather I just left in Olympia isn't good news, either.

Across Washington, we've been having too many of these "California-like days" for the past few months, and now we're facing some very serious water shortages.

The weather forecast does not promise any relief: The National Weather Service predicts dry and warm weather through May.

So, I am here today with Jay Manning, the director of the Department of Ecology, to formally authorize him to declare a drought emergency for the entire state of Washington.

**The problem**

- Precipitation is at or near record lows all across Washington, between 51 and 76 percent of average. In fact, much of Eastern Washington received less than 10 percent of its normal precipitation in February, and Western Washington didn't get much more than that.
- Snowpack in the mountains is at 26 percent of normal.
- It's only March, but our rivers are experiencing record low flows almost daily – especially on the so-called "wet" side of the state.
- Farmers in the Yakima River basin have been told they'll get about 34 percent of their normal irrigation supply from the Bureau of Reclamation.
- Even water utilities in Western Washington with large reservoirs are starting to dust off their drought-response plans

**What this means**

If you look at the past five years, drought is getting to be a regular occurrence in our state. But what we're seeing in our mountains, and in our streams, and in our reservoirs this year elevates us to a new level of concern.

A drought emergency means we are not only expecting water supplies to drop below 75 percent of average, but we also expect to experience hardships as a result of the water shortage.

While it's certainly possible that we will get an unprecedented arctic blast in the next few weeks... or get tropical monsoons in the spring... it's not a gamble I'm ready to take.

We know that the degree and severity of the drought will not be the same in all areas of the state. But it seems very likely that all areas of our state will experience at least some degree of drought this year.

In Eastern Washington, it's the farmers that are already feeling the pinch. In Western Washington, our fish-bearing streams are already facing record low flows. Even the big cities are going to have to be more cautious than usual.

I don't want to wait another month – or even another week – to start taking action.

### **So, what are we gonna do about it?**

Declaring a drought emergency activates additional authority to get water to those who need it - and it provides access to special drought funds to help cover some of the costs.

In a moment, Jay Manning will talk about some of the specifics. But I want to make sure everyone knows that I take this situation very seriously – and I expect all of state government to take it very seriously.

People's businesses and livelihoods are at stake. The stability of our domestic water supplies is at stake. And the survival of fish and critters who depend on our rivers and creeks is at stake.

So, we will go beyond just using the tools that are available under a drought emergency.

1. I will ask our congressional delegation for their help in ensuring that federal funds remain available to fight fires, and to help us identify sources of federal funding to assist our farmers.
2. I've directed General Lowenburg to have the National Guard ready, if necessary, to help fight forest fires – and the Department of Natural Resources has agreed to provide the training.  
We also will join forces with other Northwest states, if necessary, to deal with the fire situation.  
And the Emergency Management Division will hold a tabletop exercise to practice coordinating fire-fighting efforts by state and federal agencies.
3. In my budget request, I plan to replenish our drought accounts to bring them back up to \$10 million, so we have enough money to manage this drought. In addition, Public Lands Commissioner Doug Sutherland has asked for an extra \$200,000 so he can hire and train firefighters early, including the training for the National Guard troops – and I will provide that money in my budget request.
4. And I've directed state agencies that have a role in drought response to put this on the front burner and look for ways to provide needed services... because it's not just about water supplies for farms and homes, it's also about

workers losing jobs, forest fires that will have to be fought, and a recreational industry that could suffer.

And over-arching all of this is my Emergency Drought Committee, which is going to function like an emergency command center.

It will be responsible for tracking and coordinating response efforts by state agencies and making sure resources are getting to where they are needed.

### **What can citizens do?**

The people of this state have a role, too.

The fact is that we are facing a tough summer and there may not be enough water to do everything we can do in a normal year.

- So, people may need to let their cars stay dirty this summer – or use a commercial car wash that recycles its water.
- They will need to take shorter showers, flush their toilets a little less often, brush every other tooth...*(joke)*.
- They should sweep their driveways instead of hosing them down.
- They should mulch their plants so they need less water, and use efficient irrigation systems that don't waste water.
- If they're in the process of landscaping their yards, they should invest in drought-resistant plants.

There are a lot of ways people can reduce their water use so streams don't run dry - and so the farms and businesses that power our state's economic engine can keep running.

Every drop of water we save now is water that will be available later when we may really need it.

I am deeply concerned about the situation we are facing – but I also am confident that we can manage this challenge if we all contribute to the solution.

### **Sign the authorization and declaration**

And now I am going to sign a letter that is addressed to Jay Manning – authorizing the Department of Ecology to declare a drought emergency in the state of Washington.

Governor signs letter

And now, Jay Manning is going to sign the actual declaration and then give you some more details on what the state of Washington will be doing to manage the effects of the drought.

Jay Manning signs declaration and makes remarks